

Testimony by Lyn Lawrence
Before the Appropriations Committee
IN OPPOSITION TO:
The Governor's proposed DMHAS budget cuts for fiscal year 2016-17
March 6, 2015

Greetings Senator Bye, Representative Walker and distinguished Senators and Representatives of the Appropriations Committee,

My name is Lyn Lawrence. I am a resident of Bolton CT and I have been a volunteer with the North Central Regional Mental Health Board for more than a decade. Based on my personal experience, I can attest to the essential nature of the services the Board provides to the community.

- The North Central Regional Board organizes meetings, conferences and important projects that identify the needs of people who live with mental illness in our community. The Board also promotes communication between the legislature and people whose lives are too often impacted by hunger, homelessness, poverty and stigma.
- The North Central Regional Board educates the public about the lives of people who live with mental illness and helps towns and the legislature understand the experiences of individuals whose lives are affected by mental illnesses including: particularly the social and racial disparities in health outcomes of African American and other minority groups in Connecticut; the multiple health concerns associated with mental illness such as diabetes and heart disease which most alarmingly contribute to the shortened life expectancies of members of this population. The Board also represents the economic concerns of people with insufficient income or those who live with joblessness and homelessness; and transportation needs of people who want to work and rely on public transportation in seeking and keeping their jobs.
- The North Central Regional Mental Health Board advocates with people to speak to legislators and community members. For example, in 2014, I attended a North Central Mental Health Board conference on Public Transportation that was attended by the legislative chairperson of Transportation Committee. Through assembling at the Conference with a member of the legislature, people with mental illness were able to identify significant concerns pertaining to public transportation and were able to offer suggestions for improvements that would help them access jobs more easily.

Without the North Central Regional Mental Health Board, people who are historically disenfranchised will have not opportunity to have their voices heard: Funding cuts are decimating if not eliminating all advocacy agencies in Connecticut. The present funding cuts are in addition to funding cuts already faced by direct service provider agencies which have been forced to eliminate positions dedicated to Advocacy. Examples of the elimination of Advocacy

positions can be found in both private non-profit agencies such as End Hunger CT! and in state-operated clinics such as Southeast Mental Health Authority.

Having seen how much the North Central Regional Mental Health Board contributes to people's lives I urge the legislature to reinstate funding to the Regional Mental Health Boards.

Sincerely,

Lyn Lawrence
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